

Chapter 2 Shipwrecked and Drowning

*Ships don't sink because of the water around them; ships sink because of the water that gets in them.
Don't let what's happening around you get inside and weigh you down.
~ Unknown*

Titanic: the unsinkable ship.

Boy, were they wrong!

It was “unsinkable” because of the watertight bulkheads within the ship. They weren't banking on an iceberg slicing right through numerous bulkheads, leaving a hole too extensive to withstand the amount of water flooding in from the Atlantic. It sank not because of what was around it but because it couldn't handle the magnitude of what got inside of it.

You will, without a doubt, be faced with situations in your lifetime that will test you, that will break you and that will sometimes result in shipwreck. They will leave an iceberg-sized hole inside of you, leaving you open and exposed as waves of emotion come flooding in. The waves will weigh you down and try to drown you but what you need to understand is that in these moments your hardship will steer you towards where your real strength lies. You need to recognise and seize this opportunity or sinking becomes inevitable.

There is no single thing that has taught me more about life than the birth of my children. Not because it taught me how to keep them alive, but because it taught me how to keep myself alive.

My plan when I became a mum was to own it and let everyone know that I was smashing it like a pro. As it happened, the universe had other plans. From the outside, it appeared that I 'had my ship together', but this was not a reflection of what was going on inside.

I struggled through postpartum depression with all three of my children. By the time I was pregnant with my third, the inner perfectionist in me felt that I was more than prepared this time around, having been through it twice before. I knew the signs, my husband Stuart knew the signs and we both knew what help was available to us. Truth be told, I did not read the signs very well. I did not reach out as much as I should have and my depression got so bad that I probably should have been hospitalised.

Guilt quickly set in for having a messy house, for ordering take-out because I was too tired to cook, for greeting my husband at the door with a screaming baby while still in my pyjamas from the morning and for not going back to work quick enough as we struggled financially.

It was when my son, eight years old at the time, said to me through tears, 'Mummy you're always angry', that the guilt turned into shame. Shame that I screamed at my baby and left

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her to cry in her cot, shame that I yelled at my boys for spilling milk on the lounge, shame that I threw my husband's clothes out into the hall and told him to leave because he didn't understand, shame for storming out of the house and getting in my car and driving while I was in no state to drive, shame that I fell short of who I wanted to be as a wife and mother.

The cracks began to appear by the hundreds and all it took was the wrong look, the wrong words or even the wrong song on the radio to cause me to crumble into a million pieces.

Shipwrecked.

I was flooded with every emotion possible, and because of the magnitude of what got inside, I was drowning.

Depression can mask itself like the iceberg that brought down the Titanic. From the surface of the ocean you only see the tip; over 90% of an iceberg sits underwater - unseen. People on the outside looking in only see the surface result of depression. They miss the other 90% of what is going on underneath. Unfortunately, people choose to see what they want to see and often don't bother to scratch the surface to dig any deeper.

My depression resulted in withdrawal and disconnection, which led to declining many social events. I didn't have the resources for other people because I didn't even have them to help myself. That was the tip of the iceberg. What people didn't see was the internal battle I was fighting. For the most part, it was delicately balanced at a stalemate, but poised for complete destruction at any moment. It astounded me how hurt people felt if I didn't go out, or pick up the phone, or if I failed to, 'just cheer up' like they suggested. I didn't want sympathy. I didn't want anyone to solve my problems for me. I just wanted someone to sit with me while I felt like I was drowning in emotion and to know when to throw me a life jacket to keep me afloat until the lifeboat came along. I wanted someone to tell me it was okay to talk about it and someone who cared enough to ask questions rather than sending a trite text message with a well-meaning emoji.

While people judged and chose to see what they wanted to see, I turned to the only choice I had left: to see things differently. It was what I learnt about myself during this time that ultimately helped me cope with the death of the one person who always threw me a life jacket - my dad.

How did I learn to see things differently? I learnt to acknowledge the pain. Don't look away and suppress it because when you turn your back on pain, this is when it catches you unprepared. It begins to weigh you down and tries to drown you. If you turn your back to the ocean, you fail to see the size of the waves headed your way and are, therefore, not prepared. If you spot a wave headed your way don't jump over it, dive into it. Face those emotions head on. And as you emerge from the wave, just keep swimming for your shore.

While you are swimming, seek comfort in people who let you acknowledge the pain. It may be that a health professional is required to help you navigate the waters you are in, to pull you off the rocks and set you afloat again. A harbour pilot is a sailor who manoeuvres ships

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through dangerous or congested waters. For us, harbour pilots appear as life coaches, counsellors and health care practitioners - they help navigate the perilous waters because they have studied them and the hazards they contain.

For you, like it was for me, sometimes there is no immediate solution. When you can't change the outcome you need to change how you see the situation. Once you have done this, you'll notice things that you haven't before and this is when the learning and growth begins. The only way for you to fail at this is to give up. Realise there will be a great deal of discomfort in your darkest times. You will feel cold, alone and scared. But take a moment to sit with your emotions and when those cracks begin to appear, be comforted in knowing that this is how the light gets in. This is the light that shows you a different way and changes how you see the situation.

When you feel like there is no one left to fight for you, fight for yourself. This requires courage, stamina and tenacity. It is all too easy to give up, to check out of life and become a victim of your circumstances. This is as much a mental battle as it can be a physical one. To stay in the battle, find out what inspires you. Is it a powerful song? A character in a book? Your personal faith? Or a great hero of history? Once you have found a way to get motivated, take one small step forward at a time. Keep putting one foot in front of the other. Like I said to my children when they were learning to swim, 'just keep moving. Because if you stop, you sink'.

Keep a positive mindset. Stop focussing on what is wrong with you and start to recognise what is right. This will help to face the fight you have in front of you. Realise that no situation is forever and that you are stronger than you know.

You might not be thinking this far ahead, but your experience could one day be someone else's lifeboat. You might be the one to see below the surface and realise the extent of another's iceberg. You could be the one to acknowledge where someone is at in life and let them know that they are not alone. When the people you care about are shipwrecked and drowning, you will know what to do and when to throw them a life jacket.

ॐ **Action:** Make a list of what inspires you and use this when you feel like you're drowning or heading towards shipwreck.

ॐ **Song:** Feeling a Moment - Feeder